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THE ROUND TABLE

THE VEXING QUESTION OF CORRECTNESS

The great difficulty in teaching composition is to get work which is correct and at the same time natural. It is not so difficult to get either correctness or spontaneity, but to get them both together is very difficult. This is because the methods you use to attain the two results are so different. I have frequently felt myself in the plight of Alice in Wonderland when she was trying to play croquet with a hedgehog for a ball and a flamingo for a mallet. Just as she had the hedgehog rolled into suitable shape, the flamingo crooked its neck, and when she had the flamingo straightened out for a stroke, the hedgehog had uncurled itself and slipped away. In spite of the touchiness of the task, I believe it is absolutely necessary in any effective English teaching to combine the two kinds of effort. Destruction attends exclusive devotion to either. If the interest-seeking teacher is not careful she will have a pencil-consuming, head-splitting, heart-breaking mass of murdered English, while, on the other hand, the correctness-seeking teacher is likely to glean a handful of painfully starched-and-ironed themes from the conscientious and passive elements in her class, while the live wires openly scoff, or try to drop their English.

To avoid these extremes, and to travel in the light of the golden mean has been the aim in the work in Freshman composition in the Bismarck High School during the past semester. In doing this, four devices have been of assistance, and the use of the four together has seemed especially helpful in giving play for the two opposed processes. They have made it easier to coax out spontaneity and exact correctness without having the two kinds of effort get in each other's way.

The first of the four devices is the plan of "motiving" composition. Having, as it does, the idea of furnishing an audience for the student's work, this device stimulates both correctness and spontaneity at the same time. Boys who know that their work will have a good circle of readers or a roomful of hearers will take pains with its details as well as make it broadly interesting. The problem of furnishing the audience has been met by means of two city weeklies, an entertainment, and interclass and interschool letters. The students furnish school notes for

the weeklies, the editors in each case having become so interested as to offer prizes to the classes doing the best work in news getting and composing. The Freshmen "cover" the news from two ward schools as well as from the high school, furnishing both short news items and quarter- or half-column write-ups of ball games, social affairs, and other school activities. The entertainment was given as a Freshman class affair before an audience of about two hundred and fifty high-school students and visitors. The work for it, done in the English I classes, included a class paper, a short play "arranged" by the students, and an original farce. Students themselves, in the different divisions, seem to furnish the best audience for letters.

The second of the devices is the college idea of consultations, adapted to high-school conditions as they exist here. The classes average fifteen, and the students in turn bring their themes to the desk, where the instructor presides with red ink and disapproval for mistakes—the disapproval graded in intensity according to different kinds of errors—and with a sincere desire to be appreciative of all good things accomplished in thought and expression, as well as with a sympathy for all attempts. The themes are all read in the forty-five-minute period, while the students not at the desk are busy with copying or revising.

The third plan is insistence upon writing all themes twice—the first time for interest, the second for correctness; the second writing is done for the most part in class.

The fourth device, which was adopted for the first time in the past winter, is useful on the correctness side of the problem in eliminating mistakes. It is an adaptation of the plan of correction notebooks, explained, as it was used in Freshman college work, in an article in the January, 1917, number of the *English Journal*. In working with high-school Freshmen we have narrowed the plan of the notebook somewhat, making it a species of last resort in the way of correction. The students enter in it only errors uncorrected in the second writing of the themes, and, as they take especial pains to avoid having to enter any at all—this being largely possible through consultations and rewriting—entries in the notebook are few and confined to habitual or unconscious mistakes. Used in this way, the correction notebook seems distinctly valuable as a sort of unpopular backstop. The students feel that they ought to stop all mistakes before they get to the notebook, but it is there in case they do not.

These four devices seem to be appreciable helps in the oil-and-water-mixing business which the composition class is—oil of the joy

that ought to go with natural expression, and water of tears of the vexation which attends, not only teachers, but also sincere students who try to learn the difficult mechanism of English writing.

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THE PLAY PRODUCER'S NOTEBOOK

PLAY: *The Merchant Gentleman*. TYPE: Comedy of Manners. AUTHOR: Molière. TRANSLATOR: Margaret Baker. From the French of Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*.

PUBLISHER: Samuel French, 28 West 38th Street, New York, N.Y. PRICE: 50 cents.

CHARACTERS: Thirteen male, four female, musicians and dancers.

SCENE: One interior.

PERIOD: Time of Louis XIV of France.

THEME: "A lesson in good sense to those who suffer from the social ambition to rise above their proper rank."—EDWARD DOWDEN.

PRODUCTION:

Professional—In the original the play was written for the court of Louis XIV and first presented on October 14, 1670, at the royal château of Chambord, Molière taking the part of M. Jourdain, and his wife the part of Lucile.

Amateur—(1) By the Senior class of the State University Preparatory School, Tonkawa, Oklahoma, 1911; (2) by the Senior class of Bowen High School, Chicago, 1913; (3) by the Senior class of Parker High School, Chicago, 1916.

REQUIREMENTS:

Stage—A showy and pretentious drawing-room of a Parisian merchant in the time of Louis XIV. The walls and furniture should be distinctively of the period presented and should have some claim to the artistic. Moreover, a certain harmony in color scheme with the costumes of the leading actors should be observed.

Costume—The picturesque dress of the period of Louis XIV. Everything should be true to the period, consistent and artistic. It is best to put this in the hands of a first-class costumer, and rent costumes for the whole cast. The Master of Philosophy should wear the academic cap and gown; the fencing-master may use some outfit from the gymnasium. All the rest should be provided for by the costumer. The costumes for the singers should be those of shepherd and shepherdess; those of the dancers should be determined by the character of the dance.